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By Claire Lynch

*The Colebrook News & Sentinel, September 8, 2011*

U.S. Congressman Charles Bass made a tour of the North Country last week, stopping in Colebrook and Errol to speak to local constituents and take tours of the D&E Screw Machine Company on Bill Bromage Drive in Colebrook and L.L. Cote's in Errol.

He arrived in Colebrook on Tuesday with his local liaison, former N.H. House Speaker Gene Chandler of Bartlett, and started with a tour of the D&E Screw Machine facility from its owner, Dan Eldridge. With his background in engineering, it was easy to see Mr. Bass' admiration for the plan, which produces small, precision mechanical pieces primarily for the medical field and the U.S. Department of Defense.

Using the SR-10J machiner, each unit uses 45 gallons of oil and cuts everything from plastic to steel at a rate of 15,000 rpm. Mr. Eldridge recently installed three new machines, which are manufactured in Japan; this is a fact Mr. Eldridge regrets, but observed that the United States is no longer friendly to manufacturing.

"Back when everything was good, before we started sending everything overseas, we were machining millions of pieces every year," he said. "Now it's about 300,000 pieces."

His hopes for a rebound are encouraged by the fact that many pieces purchased from foreign countries, such as China, have to be re-milled to fix errors. This is an indication of quality winning over quantity, he said, and should turn the tide.

"Ultimately, it's all governed by the economy," he said.

D&E Screw Machine currently employs 14 people, working 12-hour shifts. Five percent of their productivity is shipped to outside the U.S., he said, which is, according to Mr. Bass, under the national average of 25 percent.

Congressman Bass then met with local state representatives Duffy Daugherty and Larry Rappaport at the Colebrook Town Hall, and Governor's Executive Councilor Ray Burton also joined the tour.

Rep. Rappaport explained that although he is against the proposed Northern Pass Transmission System, he is seeking an alternative route that would send it underground along the median of Interstate 93. It is in this area that the granite is already broken up, and would not be as much of a hardship on the project.

Both legislators asked the Congressman to continue opposing the project, and he related that a letter had been sent to the state in this regard.

"We have to figure out how to make sure that our opposition is recommended to the

Department of Energy," he said.

Citing his source as Christian Brousseau, a former negotiator of Hydro-Quebec, Mr. Rappaport said Public Service Company of New Hampshire stands to receive about 68 million dollars should the transmission line extend along the company's right of way.

"We need to establish a power corridor that goes north to south in the state, and it needs to be buried in the corridor and not along the right of way," he said.

"I believe that the regulators of the Federal Regulatory Agency are very neutral about this," Mr. Bass said. "They haven't said that there is a necessity to have their transmission line."

Although both Mr. Rappaport and Mr. Daugherty said the slow process of the project is damaging to the project itself, according to Mr. Bass it is injuring the state's real estate market as indicated by several sales associates and investors who have approached him.

Following an overnight stay at Tall Timber Lodge in Pittsburg, Mr. Bass, Mr. Chandler and Mr. Burton breakfasted at Howard's Restaurant before continuing east to Errol for a meeting with Luc Cote of L.L. Cote. Mr. Cote urged the elected officials to get behind the ATV riders of the state, stating that their numbers far exceed those of snowmobilers.

"We need to open the area to ATVs and have a trail system that comes right to town," Mr. Cote said. Where in years past the facility sold 120 to 130 snowmachines yearly, that has since declined to only about 40, he explained, calling it an expensive, one-season sport. "ATVs are a different sort and a can be used all year long," he noted.

Continuing, Mr. Cote implored that an ATV trail system remain in the hands of local clubs and not be controlled by the state. State campgrounds, such as Mollidgewock in Errol, are hurting private businesses and are costly to the state, he maintained. "They are trying to compete with local business and we don't need competition with the state," he said.